



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

PUBLICATIONS
OF THE
MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA,
1894.

VOL. IX, 2.

NEW SERIES, VOL. II, 2.

III.—KING LEAR: A STUDY OF SHAKSPERE'S
DRAMATIC METHOD.

As, during these Christmas days,¹ I have sunk myself in the study of *King Lear*, I have felt that in the time itself, which you have given me, there is some fitness of coincidence. It was in the Christmas days of 1606 that Shakspeare was busy with the preparation of his play for the stage. It was on the night after Christmas that the poet saw his play produced for the first time, produced before King and Court, in the palace of Whitehall. That night marks, at all events, an important epoch in the life of Shakspeare. And, if Shelley was right when he called *King Lear* "the most perfect specimen of dramatic poetry existing in the world," then that evening in Whitehall, 287 years ago, marks not only the culminating point of Shakspeare's career but also the culminating point in the poetical achievement of mankind.

Those words of Shelley, however, betray a confusion of critical thought that, among poets acting as critics, is not unusual. The *Lear* cannot, I think, be reckoned as the most perfect dramatic work of Shakspeare, or of the world, except in the sense that it represents the result of the greatest intel-

¹ This paper was read at the Annual Meeting of the Association, December 28, 1893.

lectual force, in the overcoming of the greatest practical difficulty. Now critics that are themselves poets, critics that have essayed the difficulty of creating and composing, are too apt to confound the sense of difficulty overcome with the sense of beauty in the work of art itself. This perception of difficulty, and this delight in seeing difficulty surmounted, are, indeed, a condition of all sympathetic criticism. We cannot do justice to the skill of a painter unless we know enough of painting to understand how hard that figure was to draw, how almost impossible of attainment was this particular harmony of color. It is so especially in music; it is so, in the highest degree, in poetry. Yet, after all, the beauty of the work itself may be greater, when the effect is simpler and the difficulty of the achievement less immense. This, I think, is the truth that Shelley failed to see. The *Lear*, as masterpiece of dramatic art, cannot rank with the *Agamemnon* and the *Oedipus* and the *Othello*. Yet, even as compared with work more perfect than itself in artistic impression, it rises above all in the technical difficulty of its construction, and in the technical skill that was needed to conquer and control the material.

That difficulty lay, of course, in the fusion of two separate streams of action into one artistic unity. This was the definite problem that, long before 1606, had begun to fascinate the mind of Shakspeare. He felt himself weary, as it were, of the close and narrow movement of the single action. He began a series of experiments as to the various ways of introducing a subordinate action and of combining it with the main one. In these experiments, always seeking for some novelty of arrangement, he varies much in the degree of his success. In *Twelfth Night*, for example, the fusion of the two stories was crude and imperfect, a fusion purely external and inorganic. In the *Merchant of Venice*, the fusion was ingenious and artistic, but still somewhat loose. But in the *Lear*, combining the results of all his experiments, he was at last successful in so fusing two separate streams of action as to produce a real unity of movement and effect, an union so vital, so complete, so indissoluble as, in this sense, to make the play what Shelley

called it, "the most perfect specimen of dramatic poetry existing in the world."

The two stories that Shakspeare undertook to fuse together in his *Lear* came, as you know, from sources altogether different. They belonged to regions of historical imagination that were as far as they could be aloof from each other. Thus, it was only by some accident of his reading, by some happy perception of the fitness of the two separate stories for combination, by the deliberate action of his judgment and his will, that the two streams of events ran together in his imagination. The story of Lear and his three daughters came from the vast entanglement of Celtic myth which attached itself to the legend of Celtic kings, reigning in ancient Britain. But the story of Gloucester and his two sons came from the second book of Sidney's *Arcadia*, as legend of an ancient king of Paphlagonia. In the one story, there was the father deceived in the character of his daughters, and finding love only in that one whose love he had denied and spurned. In the other story, there was the father, deceived in the character of his sons, and finding allegiance and affection only in him that he had sought to destroy as assassin and parricide. Thus, in the two stories, along with their antithetical difference, there was an almost artificial symmetry of plan and movement. And so, in the mind of the poet, at some happy moment of stimulated creative power, the two stories, coming from regions and times so different, and so completely independent, flashed together, as capable of so supplementing each other, as to merge in one great movement of tragical emotion.

In the fusion of the two stories, King Lear, of course, was to stand in antithesis to the Earl of Gloucester, and the relations between Lear and his daughters were to be paired off with the relations between Gloucester and his sons. But, in thus coupling the two stories, so as to make them run together, Shakspeare made one contrast of deep dramatic significance. The story of Lear was so presented as to bring the virtuous character of Cordelia into the highest predominance of effect ;

but the story of Gloucester was so turned as to give that predominance to the vicious character of Edmund. Thus, in the construction of the double drama, it is the conflict between the good influence of Cordelia and the evil influence of Edmund that creates the tragic situation and leads to the sublime horrors of the catastrophe. If Regan, for example, had been as heroine paired off with Edmund as hero, or if Edgar, the good son, had been paired off with Cordelia, the good daughter, the movement of the drama would have been enfeebled, and the ineffable pathos of the tragedy have been lost. It is, therefore, in the organic contrast between the characters of Cordelia and Edmund that the double tragedy of Lear and Gloucester reaches its highest effect.

In the tragedy of Lear's fate it is the action of Cordelia that determines the main movement of the drama. It was the apparent coldness and the bluntness of her speech and manner that impelled her father to his folly. It was her strong will and her heroic sense of duty and affection that came to his succor. It was her exquisite tenderness of love that soothed him in his madness and restored him to reason. And yet, for a character of such profound importance the delineation that Shakspeare bestows upon it is singularly succinct. Cordelia is seldom upon the stage, and she says very little. In scale of dramatic development, speaking only 115 verses, she stands as 25th among the heroines of the Shaksperian dramas, the lowest of all. She is portrayed, with infinite skill, rather by a series of hints for our imagination than by many details of portraiture. She was the youngest of Lear's three daughters, and, as such, the special pet and darling of her father. Without a mother to guide her, she had been thrown under the influence of her elder sisters, and had been forced even in childhood to watch their ways and to understand their characters. As so often happens in family-life, in the great conservative movement of nature, she had found in those sisters not models to imitate, but special forms of depravity to shun. Receiving no love from them, unblinded by any

glamour of affection, she had discovered in girlhood the feebleness and viciousness of her sisters' characters. And this discovery, as was natural, had tended to give undue emphasis to her own peculiarities of mind and temper. Were it not for this movement of reaction, as modern science has proved, all types of the family and of individual life would go from worse to worse in ever deepening decadence. This was the cause of that astounding unlikeness between Cordelia and her sisters which so amazed all that knew them (IV. 3, 35). As they were wily and treacherous, devoid of all sense of truth, so she tended to become, even to excess, truthful and blunt. As they were selfish and sensual, devoid of all natural affection, so in reaction against them, she lived only to do her duty, in absolute purity of spirit.

This difference was, in Shakspeare's conception, manifest even in physical appearance and in manner. As against the splendid and sensuous beauty of her sisters, the beauty of Cordelia was gentle and refined and unobtrusive. (She was, according to stage tradition, blue-eyed, IV. 3, 30.) Her clear, honest eyes showed at once the purity of her soul and the keen penetration of her intellect, IV. 3, 22. Her complexion was delicate. Her lips were full and soft, instinct with expression. In times of deepest distress, at the slightest touch of kindness, even while her eyes were full of tears, her lips by their tender smile could evince gratitude and affection.

"Those happy smilets
That played on her ripe lips seemed not to know
What guests were in her eyes." IV. 3, 18.

As deepest indication, however, of the refinement and noble purity of her nature, a test almost infallible, there was the perfect charm of her voice, free from self-assertion and falseness of key.

"A voice . . . ever soft,
Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman." V. 3, 272.

This physical nature of the woman was used by Shakspeare as the direct expression of her intellectual qualities. She was, to a great extent, devoid of that easy social tact and of that power of fascination which Shakspeare has recognized in Viola, for example, or in Portia, as the supreme grace of womanhood. She was too blunt, too outspoken, too disdainful of easy professions and conventionalities. This fault, rising at times to ruthless indiscretion, brought on her those calamities of life which in Shakspeare's world, as in the real world, are more often the result of simple indiscretion than of actual vice. But apart from this one fault of mind, she had an intense penetration of intellectual insight, and a perfect knowledge of human character. Even as a child, she had reached, for example, a correct judgment of her sisters, foreseeing, even before evil came, their fatal tendency toward evil. Her father's character also she knew so perfectly as to make it the more blameworthy in her that she did not choose to yield to him in small matters, to humor him and keep him from follies. So, of all the men that were about her in the daily life of the court, she had formed her true judgment. She understood and prized the rough loyalty of the Duke of Kent. She knew how to win the vacillating Earl of Gloucester to her father's support. She recognized from the beginning the difference between the utter vileness of the Duke of Cornwall and the half-good that was latent in the Duke of Albany. Even of her own strange character, of its faults as well as its virtues, she had perfect knowledge, that self-knowledge, highest and rarest of all (I. 1, 224). The same infallible good sense is seen in her way of managing her husband, and in all the steps that she took to succor and save her father. Her talk, for example, with the physician, to whose care she commits her father, and all the means she employs to clear away the clouds from her father's intellect are full of practical wisdom. In every crisis of her fate, she is cool and sagacious, never flurried, never losing self-control. This was the quality of mind that impressed all

that had to deal with her. It was summed up in the admiring words of the Duke of Kent.

"She thinks justly and speaks most rightly." I. 1, 183.

The moral nature of Cordelia has been, in part, already revealed. Those qualities of soul that impress us most are her passionate love of truth and her inflexible sense of duty. Her faults are faults rather of manner than of heart, faults due to her disgust at her sisters' baseness. But her virtues are the highest that can exist in the human soul. And they give her, in all the entanglements of her life, a sublime courage. Remember, for example, the modest coolness of resolution with which she forced her father, amid all his railing and raving, to vindicate the purity of her maidenly honor (I. 1, 223). Think, also, of the queenly dignity with which she received her rejection in marriage by the Duke of Burgundy. So, the intrepid resolution with which she leads her army into England, to rescue her father, and the serene fortitude with which, when captured and led off to death, she sustains her father's courage. In moral nature, as in mental quality, she is entirely heroic.

But, if this were all, there would still be in Cordelia's character a certain hardness and coldness. It is here, I think, that Shakspeare reveals the full grandeur of his conception of feminine character. This woman, so conspicuous for bluntness of speech, for firmness of conscience, for courage and self-control and fortitude, is in reality, under the mask of her reticence, the tenderest and sweetest and most loving of women. So far from being hard by nature, she is tender and affectionate. So far from being cold of heart, she is capable of the most ardent and passionate emotion. This warmth of Cordelia's emotional nature is first revealed in her vehement scorn and indignation at her sisters' wickedness. But it comes to light chiefly in her life-long devotion to her foolish old father. Driven away from him by his insults and curses, she remembers him only with the tenderest love; and giving up the peace and calm of her own happy life, she devotes herself to her father's salva-

tion. She forgets his follies and his crime in her sense of his overwhelming sorrows. She comes like an angel, out of her own world, to seek him and to save him. The scene in which, with tender word and loving caress, she wins him back to reason, is perhaps the highest effect ever reached of pure pathos. It is in two ways a triumph of Shakspeare's art. By combining Cordelia's force of intellect with her ardor of emotion, he raises her words into unsurpassable eloquence. And by combining her loftiness of moral nature with her infinite tenderness of heart, he creates for poetry the highest type of complete womanhood.

As the story of Lear hinges upon the character and conduct of Cordelia, so the story of Gloucester hinges upon the character and conduct of Edmund. And thus, in artistic composition, over against the sublime beauty of Cordelia's virtues there stands the brilliant and fascinating depravity of Edmund.

In scale of delineation, Edmund speaking 312 lines, takes more than twice the part of Cordelia (115). In this he stands, however, only as 33rd among Shakspeare's heroes, his men, as a rule, talking far more than his women. Within these limits, about one-third of the space allowed to Iago, the character of Edmund is portrayed with splendid precision of touch. His person, the physical basis of his villainies, is far more attractive than Iago's. The son of a beautiful mother, he has in himself that perfection of manly beauty which wins the confidence of men and exercises seduction upon women. He prides himself upon his manly figure and the solidity and strength of his well-trained body (i. 7, 7). A soldier from early youth, he bore himself with all the dash and splendor of success in his profession. Bold, enterprising, unscrupulous, he took, in spite of his base birth, a conspicuous place at Lear's court. Men liked and admired him, and women recognized in him at once, as Goneril phrases it, "a man to whom women's services are due" (iv. 2, 26). The jealous Regan, remembering certain scenes of her own in dark corners, gives a lively

sketch of his promptness and audacity in love-making (IV. 5, 25).

In intellectual quality, if not so solid and discreet as Iago, he was more showy and brilliant. His quickness of intelligence and his quickness of decision marked him, as always, for a great soldier. At every stage of his career, he seized with marvellous rapidity the situation that was before him, and turned it with unfailing skill to his own advantage. He was free from all superstition, from all reverence, full of scorn for the follies and weaknesses of the people around him (I. 2, 113-127). As he had spent his life in soldiering, he displayed at once, when raised to command, the power to control men and to arrange campaigns. In the field, all his movements were full of purpose and energy, and all his plans were successful. And even outside of his profession, as with the great Marlborough, whom Shakspeare seems to have anticipated in creating Edmund, his power of flattering the men or the women that he wished to use, and his power of simulation and dissimulation rose to the highest limit of intellectual force. As part of his means of deception, he was full of fine sentiments, a sort of Joseph Surface in his high talk of honor and principle (III. 5, 25 and V. 1, 14). But even when he was speaking, so far as he could speak, honestly, he was master of a brilliant eloquence (I. 2, 1-22). Over against this manifold force of intellect, there was, however, one intellectual fault in Edmund, the fault that for the safety of human society is almost always found in men so clever and so wicked. He was himself so devoid of real feeling, so incapable of real affection, as to be unable to make the right estimate for their existence and their power in others. To him, for example, love was only a flattery of the senses, and, in seducing Regan and Goneril, he saw in them, with their wild passions and fierce jealousies, only pawns in the game of his own ambition. In making love to both, he had no real love for either. But, in playing this game, he forgot that the passion of love, which meant so little to him, might be to them a terrible reality.

And thus, in sheer abuse and disdain of love, he brought upon himself, through the love of these women for him, the turn of fortune that crushed him. It was only as he lay dying, in the utter collapse of all his ambitious schemes, that the true significance and power of love, as the supreme consolation of human life, flashed itself into his soul (v. 3, 240). He had failed in all else, but he died calm and almost jubilant, in remembering how greatly he had been loved. In this one speech of the dying bastard, Shakspeare has revealed to us how much of the heroic was involved in his conception of Edmund as hero of the tragedy.

The story of Lear as developed by the action of Cordelia, and the story of Gloucester, as developed by the action of Edmund, had each, by itself and in itself, fine elements of tragical interest. Yet, from Shakspeare's point of view, the story of Lear, as it stood in the old books, was manifestly incapable of being converted, as a separate action, into a drama. For this, as I think, the reason is obvious. The story of King Lear by itself, after the division of his kingdom and his quarrel with Cordelia, events that occur in the 1st scene of the 1st Act, is only a psychological study. It gives the results of an action, but not the action itself. It is the picture of an old man of splendid, but disordered intellect, sinking stage after stage, by reason of one deed of surpassing folly and cruelty, into hopeless ruin of fortune, into madness and death. As a study of psychological condition, it does not represent the rise and progress of the dramatic emotion, and it does not give the culmination of that emotion in any decisive deed. In fact, after the fatal folly of laying down his royal power and driving Cordelia from him, Lear is incapable of any action at all. He is simply driven, by force of circumstances, as the result of the action already done, into deeper and deeper depths of humiliation and misery. In itself, therefore, the pitiful story of the mad king, after the 1st scene of the 1st Act, was, as Shakspeare rightly saw, devoid of the true dramatic quality, and incapable of shaping itself into a real drama. This was

the reason that led him, as I think, to supplement the story of Lear and Cordelia by the story of Gloucester and Edmund. This happy combination of the two stories, on a plan never elsewhere attempted, produced the amazing grandeur of the result. For the story of Edmund had in itself just what the story of Lear lacked, the definite dramatic emotion and the definite dramatic action. It was capable, therefore, of absorbing into itself the story of Lear's calamities, and of carrying it along with itself to a dramatic conclusion. As the result of this fusion, it is the study of Lear's character and the picture of his mental decay that form the pathos and the vital charm of the poem ; but it is the passion and the action of Edmund, the rise and downfall of his fortunes, that supply the form of the drama and its dramatic movement.

Such was, I think, Shakspeare's reason for combining the action of the Edmund-tragedy with the action of Lear and Cordelia. It was a reason that grew out of his consummate knowledge of construction ; and, in the details and method of that construction, it led to the highest achievement of constructive skill that the art of poetry has ever reached. This may be seen even in his manner of bringing together the characters of the two stories. In adding the new action to the old action, he added a group of three essential characters, belonging to the Edmund-story, to the ten essential characters belonging to the Lear-story. But in the handling of these thirteen characters, the mode of interaction is so ingenious that it is no longer possible to separate them into two groups. Each character is made essential to the movement of both plots. Thus, for example, the fate of Lear is made dependent on the action of Gloucester's two sons ; and, in like manner, the fate of Edmund is brought about by the action of Lear's daughters. In this thorough fusion of the two separate groups of characters into one group, that is henceforth inseparable, there is the first evidence of the constructive plan that Shakspeare has followed in building up the play.

The same skill is shown, in the next place, in the arrangement and sequence of the separate scenes. In this point, as compared with the drama of single action, the drama of double action is, of course, far more complicated and difficult ; and it is in watching the method used by Shakspeare in sustaining the movement of each story unbroken that we gain the most amazing sense of his intellectual power. The entire action of the *Lear* works itself out in one hundred and three scenes. Of these, there are forty-two (42) that may be said to belong to the movement of the *Lear*-tragedy and twenty-nine (29) that belong to the movement of the *Edmund*-tragedy, taken separately. And, finally, in order to unite the movement of the two tragedies, there are thirty-two (32) scenes that serve as links between the two actions. These link-scenes, if there were time to examine and interpret their double significance, would show themselves to be the poet's most wonderful achievement in dramatic art. Consider, for example, the 25th scene, II. 1, 1-13, when Edmund learns from Curan that Cornwall is coming to seek the alliance of the Earl of Gloucester ; or, still better, the 30th scene, II. 1, 86-129, when Edmund's father succeeds in persuading the Duke of Cornwall to take his bastard son into his service. Such scenes are almost peculiar to the art of Shakspeare. They belong equally to the movement of both plots. They throb, as it were, with the double life of both dramas. If any one of these link-scenes were missing from its place, the whole construction would tumble at once into disorder and incoherence. And yet, in all the artfulness of this intricate combination, Shakspeare never fails to fill each scene to the very brim with sharp delineation of character and with vehemence of passion. It is, I think, in this union of the most perfect art with the highest emotional power that the dramatic genius of Shakspeare rises above rivalry.

Finally, in order to seize the full method of Shakspeare's combination, each of the two separate actions must be considered by itself, in the nature of its own dramatic emotion

and in the attainment of its own climax. Here again, each drama has its own life, its own movement, its own ethical significance, its own dramatic problem. And here again, Shakspeare has found a way, outside of all precedent and of all comparison, to fuse the two actions together, and to combine them into a definite unity of movement and catastrophe.

In the tragedy of Edmund's fate, if considered by itself, all is simple and definite and regular. It has a movement of action that flows from a simple and natural dramatic emotion. It presents in regular sequence all the five stages of the Aristotelean scheme. Each of the five (5) parts of the dramatic movement is present in its regular place and in its normal proportions. The dramatic emotion reveals itself, of course, in the climax-scene of the tragedy. It stands in the very centre of composition, in the middle of the 3rd act, in the 50th scene, III. 3, 21-25. The young bastard, partly from a natural feeling of indignation at seeing his mother put to shame and his own base birth made a bar to his career, and partly from the natural eagerness to push himself in the world, has yielded to the temptation of ruining his legitimate brother and of usurping his place in his father's affection. In this state of mind, after his brother has been outlawed, he learns from his father the secret that puts his father's life and estate in his power. If now he join with his father in restoring Lear to his throne, he can save his father from peril, and bring peace and order into the kingdom. If he betray his father's plans to the Duke of Cornwall, he can have him put to death as a traitor, and himself, in spite of his base birth, made earl in his father's place. The dramatic situation is admirable. The dramatic problem is clear and definite. The dramatic emotion is simple in its nature and powerful in its action. Edmund decides, of course, to betray his father, and to take the earldom as the prize of his treachery, and the stepping-stone of his enormous ambition. This is the decision that the climax brings about, as the inevitable result of the situation; and it is from this climax-scene that all the later

movement of the tragedy, up to the moment of Edmund's death, is evolved. Thus, in construction, the tragedy of Edmund is perfectly regular and perfectly complete. It rises to a climax preceded by 1702 verses; it sinks to a catastrophe preceded by 1516 verses. If taken by itself, it would be a tragedy on the general plan of *Macbeth*, and would give a picture, almost as powerful, of the growth and culmination and consequences of a selfish and criminal ambition.

But now, in order to combine the tragedy of Edmund's career with the more awful tragedy of Lear's doom, Shakspeare has used the one only as the means of revealing the other. The character of Edmund is to be subordinated to the character of Lear; the emotion and the action of Edmund are to be employed only to make plain to us the results of Lear's emotion and of Lear's action. And this is done by a process of construction so strange and unprecedented as to make the tragedy of *Lear* stand, in form and in sentiment, solitary in the literature of mankind.

Here also it is the climax-scene of the drama that reveals the dramatic emotion. The old king is weary of the burden of kingship. All ambition is gone from him, all sense of obligation and of duty, all desire except for selfish ease of existence and for the full enjoyment of his daughters' worship and affection. It is here that he falls under the full dominion of the passion that leads him to his ruin. It takes, in his weary and disordered mind, the form of a mad desire for love, and for the manifestation and expression of love. Thus Lear stands as type of a class of men and women not rare among people of highly emotional nature. Their one desire in life, half selfish, half noble, is to stimulate the love of those about them, and to live with their souls bathed in the perpetual sunshine of that love which they have aroused. It is alas! a passion, as Shakspeare has meant to show us, that eats away the virtue of the soul and unfits it for the discharge of duty and for the wise control of life. For there come periods in all human existence, and above all in the existence of families

and in the relation between parents and children, when the resolve to fulfil a duty must be stronger than the desire to be loved. And thus arises the problem that arose for King Lear. Are we in dealing with those that we love to act in such a way as to gladden our own hearts by their expressions of rapturous gratitude and affection? or in such a way as even at the cost of personal ease and happiness, to be right and just and honest?—Is the goal of life to be the attainment of love, in the shape of gratitude and affection, or in the discharge of duty and the full satisfaction of conscience? This was the problem that Lear in his treatment of his daughters had to solve; and because he solved it wrong, and came to a feeble and wicked decision, his failure in moral force brought equally upon the daughters that he loved and upon himself all the horrors of guilt and ruin. His action was in this way, to use the modern term, the morbid action of the sentimentalist, that is, of the man in whom the passion for love is strong and the sense of duty feeble. His wish was to stimulate his daughters' affection by his own generosity, and so to live happy for the future in the untroubled enjoyment of their rapturous love. But his delight in the false professions and ardent vows of Goneril and Regan made him, of necessity, unjust and cruel in dealing with the more reserved and candid soul of Cordelia. Thus, in the problem and in the action of Lear, there is the solemn warning of the woes and crimes that result from letting sentiment dominate conscience, from valuing the manifestation of love more highly than the fulfilment of duty.

The climax-scene of the *Lear* tragedy fulfils thus all the functions of the regular dramatic climax. It reveals the dramatic problem and the dramatic emotion; it brings before us all the features of the dramatic situation; it determines all the movement of the dramatic action, and the inevitable result of the dramatic catastrophe. But, in comparison with all other models of construction, the climax-scene of the *Lear* exhibits one strange irregularity. Instead of standing in the centre of

composition, it stands almost at the beginning, in the 3rd scene of 103 scenes, preceded by only 80 verses and followed by 3090. This is that irregularity of structure which gives to the *Lear* its peculiar and perplexing movement. For in dealing with the story of Lear, Shakspeare has not chosen to exhibit to us the development of his character, nor the origin and gradual growth of that passion for love which impelled him to his ruin. When Lear comes before us, he comes as an old man, with this sentimentality of disposition already developed by the circumstances of his life almost into insanity. And by thus placing the climax in the 3rd scene, Shakspeare has, of course, deranged all the proportions of the dramatic action. There is a protasis of only 34 lines, followed at once by the opening of action, i. 1, 35-81. This opening of action, contained in 47 lines, is in reality the only epitasis that the drama contains. Then comes, in 58 lines, the climax itself. Lear, misled by the false ardor of Goneril and Regan, and by the apparent coldness of Cordelia, gave his kingdom to them, and reserved for her only his curse. At this point, the 138th line of the 1st scene, the climax of the action is fully reached, and the fate of Lear determined. By this arrangement, unprecedented, as I believe, in dramatic art, all the remainder of the tragedy, 99 scenes, 3060 verses, is thrown together in one huge catabasis. Here, in this fourth stage of the dramatic action, at immense length, with splendid profusion of detail, we have the full exhibition of those results that flowed from Lear's false decision and unwise action. Only at the end, in one scene of 32 verses, there is a brief catastrophe, giving the final settlement of things after Lear's death.

Thus the special mark of the tragedy of Lear, among all the dramas of the world, is the abnormal and monstrous development of the 4th stage of action, the catabasis. In other tragedies, Shakspeare has chosen to exhibit, as for example in the *Macbeth*, or in the Edmund tragedy itself, the growth of a wicked passion and its outburst into action. But in the *Lear*, and in the *Lear* alone, he has chosen, while hiding the

origin of the passion, to reveal to us, in the most elaborate and awful picture ever given in literature, only the ruin that results in human life from an act of sin and folly. Stage after stage, in ever widening circles of crime and calamity, the consequences of Lear's mistake are exhibited as falling first upon himself and then in succession upon each one, man or woman, that he loved. But, in order to sustain the movement of this otherwise unwieldy and drooping catabasis, he has blended the emotion of the Lear-tragedy with the regular and stirring action of the story of Edmund. At every stage in the combined movement, the same events that serve to mark a downward step in Lear's fate are made at the same time to mark a step of progress in the fulfilment of Edmund's plans. Thus, for example, in the 95th scene, v. 3, 1-26, the passage that brings Lear and Cordelia to captivity and death, brings Edmund, by his victory over the French army, to the highest point of his soaring fortunes. To gain this effect, to use the stir and movement of the story of Edmund's career as the means of developing the pathos and the psychological interest of the story of Lear's ruin, this was, I think, the final purpose of Shakspere in combining the two streams of action. By this means, he has done what otherwise could not in dramatic form have been done at all ; and the exquisite art of the combined movement represents, I think, the highest point of excellence ever attained by a dramatic poet in purely constructive skill.

THOMAS R. PRICE.